

## Draft Alternatives Public Process

Sending the Draft Alternatives to the public and holding public meetings were additional planning steps to ensure the public fully comprehended the range of draft alternatives and was able to comment effectively on these draft alternatives. The primary purpose of this planning step was to understand the public's concerns and preferences with regard to the range of draft alternatives and to assist the planning team in refining the draft alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.

The official draft alternatives public process began in February 2008 when the NPS mailed the Draft Alternatives Newsletter to approximately 450 contacts on the NRA's mailing list and announced this planning step on the NPS websites ([www.nps.gov/rola](http://www.nps.gov/rola) and <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/rola>).

The newsletter fully outlined the concepts and actions in the draft alternatives and proposed management zones. A planning schedule, including dates, times, and locations for the public workshops, invited public participation and comments on the range of draft alternatives. The newsletter also contained a business reply questionnaire that asked the public to comment on the four draft alternatives.

Press releases were prepared and mailed to local media in advance of the public meetings by the North Cascades National Park Service Complex staff.

### Workshops

The NPS held four public workshops in Concrete, Sedro-Woolley, Bellingham, and Seattle in February and March 2008. Seventy people participated in the public workshops and provided oral comments.

Public Draft Alternatives Workshops 2008		
Location	Date	Attendance
Concrete, WA	February 25, 2008	12
Sedro-Woolley, WA	February 26, 2008	26
Bellingham, WA	March 4, 2008	16
Seattle, WA	March 5, 2008	16
TOTAL 70		

The workshops began with a presentation of the draft alternatives and then transitioned into facilitated group discussions. In the cases of meetings with large attendance, separate stations were set up for the topics of Recreation/Visitor Experience, Natural and Cultural Resources, and Facilities. Members of the public were encouraged to visit any or all of the stations to provide comments and join discussions on those topics. Each station was attended by NPS staff with expertise on the relevant issues. Staff took detailed notes on all comments received in their groups.

Representatives of the following organizations, agencies, and businesses attended one or more of the public workshops:

- The Access Fund
- American Whitewater
- British Columbia Ministry of the Environment
- The Mountaineers
- National Parks Conservation Association
- North Cascades Conservation Council
- North Cascades Institute
- Pacific Northwest Trail Association
- Ross Lake Resort
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit Alpine Club
- Skagit Citizens Alliance for Rural Preservation
- Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission
- Whatcom County Backcountry Horsemen
- The Wilderness Society

## **Written Comments**

Thirty-two written responses were collected from letters, e-mails, newsletter questionnaires, and comments submitted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. The vast majority of written comments were received from Washington State.

The following organizations submitted written comments on the draft alternatives:

- The Wilderness Society
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit Citizens Alliance for Rural Preservation
- Washington Seaplane Pilots Association
- The Mountaineers

- National Parks Conservation Association
- North Cascades Institute
- Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission
- Skagit Commercial Use Authorized Users

## **Summary of Draft Alternatives Public Comments**

The comments on the draft alternatives covered a broad range of topics, issues, and recommendations for the NRA. When compiled, 150 different comments or ideas were represented, with a total of 539 individual comments provided overall. Because various statements or ideas were mentioned repeatedly, similar comments are stated once, but the number of times a particular point was made has been tabulated. This method highlights the comments that people stated were most important and needed to be addressed in the GMP. However, each comment was recorded and an attempt was made to incorporate all concerns and ideas into this summary.

The following summary is organized by topics that will be addressed for each alternative in the Draft GMP/EIS. The topics are: Recreation and Visitor Experience, Natural Resources, Access and Transportation, Facilities, Interpretation and Education, Cultural Resources, and Operations.

The majority of comments received were related to recreation and visitor experience. Natural resources, access and transportation issues, and facilities each accounted for approximately ten percent of comments. Smaller percentages were split between the additional issue areas discussed below.

### **Recreation and Visitor Experience**

Recreation and Visitor Experience was the most common area of comment overall, with nearly half of all comments submitted. Within this category, the following topics received comments.

- Lake recreation
- Camping
- Trails, hiking, and climbing
- Motorized recreation
- Non-motorized recreation
- Fees and reservations
- Wilderness

#### ***Lake Recreation***

Lake recreation was an area of strong interest to the public, and the majority of recreation comments overall were related to the use of motorboats within

the NRA. Although a few commenters supported continuing current motorboat policies and practices, the public expressed a high level of support for setting limits on motorboats in order to protect resources and maintain a high quality visitor experience. There was also strong support for implementing a deadline for engine restrictions before the alternative's proposed date of 2020.

Suggestions for how to limit motorboats included setting speed limits, restricting motorboat activities to certain geographic areas, restricting amphibious craft, and creating a motorboat "season." There was a moderate amount of support for phasing out gas-powered boats in favor of different engine types. Some opposition to towing of people was also expressed.

The public comments also reflected support for non-motorized boating within the NRA.

### ***Camping***

Public comments on camping stated support for maintaining camping opportunities as well as support for limited improvements and enhancements. In the face of severe or catastrophic weather events, the public was in favor of a "no net loss" approach to rebuilding campgrounds. Several commenters wanted the NPS to retain existing popular campground sites such as Colonial Creek and Goodell, or provide comparable experiences.

Several comments related to the Hozomeen campground area, in support of improved facilities and programs, including the new ranger station/visitor center, and additional interpretive opportunities.

A number of comments also encouraged development of large group areas within the NRA, including campsites and picnic areas. These facilities could be geared toward families, educational groups, or other visitor groups.

Some support was expressed for maintenance and improvement of backcountry campsites, as well as for additional frontcountry camping opportunities, including walk-in sites. A few comments stressed maintaining current sites as they are, and were opposed to expansion. Some comments opposed expanded campsite infrastructure such as electricity and RV hookups. The boat-in campsites were of interest to the public, with equal numbers supporting maintenance of the existing boat-in sites and providing new or enhanced boat-in sites. There was also minimal support for year-round camping and recreational access.

### ***Trails, Hiking, and Climbing***

The majority of comments on trails and hiking stated support for increased or improved trails within the NRA, including day-hiking trails along the Highway 20 corridor. The public comments also included several specific ideas for new trails. A few comments suggested limiting the amount of new trails, either by location, length, or number. Additionally, a few commenters preferred to focus on maintaining existing trails.

Most comments related to sport climbing expressed support for enhanced climbing management, including such possibilities as establishing a climbing permit system and developing Climbing Management Areas. A few comments supported continuing the climbing opportunities as they currently exist.

### ***Motorized Recreation***

The most comments on motorized recreation were related to seaplanes. Several commenters wanted to maintain current seaplane access to the NRA, and expressed concern about possible future limitations on seaplane use. Several comments also suggested restricted seaplane use within the NRA, including specific ideas such as designating use areas and restricting times of operation. There was also some general concern about aircraft and interest in limiting overflights.

Additionally, some support was provided for limiting snowmobile use.

### ***Non-motorized Recreation***

The most prevalent theme among comments on non-motorized recreation was support for enhancements of stock trailer parking opportunities and improved horse trails and facilities. There was concern with security and vandalism in current parking areas, as well as potential conflict with non-stock users. Some commenters also wanted improvements to bicycle access and facilities, as well as for restrictions on hunting. A few comments were supportive of promoting non-motorized winter recreation.

### ***Fees and Reservations***

The public expressed strong support for an expanded reservation system. Ideas included providing additional online information and reservation features, as well as allowing some permits and camping reservations to be arranged online or remotely. A few comments supported implementing limited user fees, which could be restricted to certain geographic areas or activities. Some commenters also stated a concern about obtaining backcountry reservations when entering the NRA from the east.

## ***Wilderness***

Several comments expressed general support for wilderness preservation within the NRA. In addition, the idea of preserving the “wilderness character” of the NRA was also stated several times.

## **Natural Resources**

The most common comments on natural resource discussed the need for ecosystem preservation and for native species restoration and stewardship.

Noise and light pollution were of concern to the public, and comments expressed strong support for preserving natural soundscapes and dark night sky. There were also several comments in support of continued fire management practices, including cooperative fire management and allowing natural fires to burn. A few comments provided support for a Wild and Scenic River study of the Skagit River.

Strong support was also provided for low-impact research activities within the NRA.

## **Access and Transportation**

Access and transportation comments focused on roads, parking, universal access, and alternative transportation.

Comments related to Highway 20 were raised about increased traffic along the highway corridor and its potential impacts on safety, visitor experience, and the rural character of communities outside the NRA. The public was also concerned about noise levels along Highway 20 and the need for noise reduction. A few comments expressed support for additional pullouts and overlooks and universal access to resources within the NRA. There was also a moderate level of support for expanding the Ross Lake parking lot.

There was also strong support for developing alternative transportation options within the NRA. A few commenters supported the undertaking of a transportation study to analyze transportation issues.

Additionally, a few commenters expressed opposition to the idea of paving the road from Hope to Hozomeen.

## **Facilities**

Public comments on the draft alternatives included many new ideas for placement or development of facilities within the NRA. Several public comments were received specific to the Wilderness Information Center and its potential future location. Several commenters supported moving the facility to

Highway 20. Some commenters suggested maintaining the Wilderness Information Center in its current location.

Some commenters expressed support for improved park entrances and improved signage for trails, facilities, and permitting stations. Some people wanted a modest expansion of the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center. A few commenters provided support for employee housing.

Other comments on facilities supported maintenance and enhancements at Desolation and a new ranger station/visitor center at Hozomeen.

## **Interpretation and Education**

Comments on interpretation and education focused on continuation and enhancement of park-based programs. There was also strong support for an increase in interpretation of cultural resources within the NRA, including the history of the hydroelectric projects and Native American history and use. Comments supported a continued relationship with the North Cascades Institute and Environmental Learning Center and other education partnerships. Additional comments expressed support for increasing interpretive staff presence within the NRA.

## **Climate Change**

Several commenters supported taking actions to reduce the NRA's carbon footprint and reduce potential contributions to climate change. A moderate level of public support was expressed for applying sustainable or "green" building design to new facilities.

## **Cultural Resources**

Some support was expressed for researching, documenting, and interpreting cultural resources as well as providing access to cultural resources.

## ***Concessions***

Several commenters wanted an expanded water taxi service on Ross Lake. Several commenters were concerned with potential impacts of expanding the Ross Lake Resort. Issues of concern included carrying capacity, design issues, access, and potential impacts to visitor experience and neighboring campsites. Comments were also received in support of additional overnight lodging opportunities both within and outside the NRA.

### ***Partnerships***

The public comments showed strong support for domestic interagency partnerships, primarily with the U.S. Forest Service and continued cross-border cooperation and partnership with Canada.

### ***Seattle City Light***

Several comments relating to Seattle City Light facilities were received. These were predominately in support of adaptive reuse options in the Diablo and Newhalem town sites. In addition, there were several comments in support of additional Seattle City Light-provided public amenities, such as landscaping and wayside exhibits. The public also expressed interest in increased interpretation of Seattle City Light activities such as facility tours, and interpretation of hydroelectric history.

### ***Staffing***

A few comments from the public expressed support for increased staffing presence within the NRA, including rangers, interpreters, and seasonal staff.

### ***Carrying Capacity***

Some public comments were received concerning carrying capacity issues. Concern was expressed with how increased visitorship will be handled in the future and resulting impacts on visitor experience.

### ***Lands***

A few comments suggested expanding the NRA boundary. Suggestions included incorporating areas in the Okanagan National Forest, including areas to the east such as Spratt Mountain, Jack Mountain, Crater Mountain, and Cutthroat Pass as well as parts of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest such as Lookout Mountain, Boulder and Jordan Creeks, Cyclone Lake, and South Cascade Lake.

### **Proposed Alternatives**

The public thought that the actions in the range of draft alternatives were appropriate. Of the alternatives presented, Alternative B received the highest level of support; however, several commenters expressed a desire for an alternative that would combine elements of the alternatives presented to the public. Alternative D also received strong public support. Alternative C received the fewest comments of support and also received a few opposition comments.